



# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

## Lesson 01: Introduction

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### Slide 1-1. Welcome

This course was developed to increase your awareness about sexual assault crimes. It is not intended to make you an expert in sexual assault investigations.

Upon completion of this course, you should be more aware of important sexual assault issues, including:

- Stereotypes, assumptions, myths, and misconceptions,
- Changing dynamics,
- Acquaintance, spouse, or partner sexual assault,
- Sexual assault of men, lesbians, and gays, and
- Sexual assault of the elderly and disabled.

### Slide 1-2. Course Overview

The National Crime Victimization Survey reports that approximately 293,000 persons are victims of sexual assault each year. Many assaults go unreported. Despite these numbers, few of us understand the number of issues related to sexual assaults and their impact upon law enforcement's ability to obtain reports to investigate these crimes and apprehend offenders.

We use the term "victim" to refer to a person who experienced sexual violence. When working on a sexual assault investigation, a law enforcement officer may also use or hear the term "survivor" to refer to the person who experienced sexual violence. This term is often used to describe someone who is no longer experiencing sexual violence, and reflects the strength of the person for having survived it.

We will begin by considering the socialized attitudes, beliefs, and practices that contribute to a culture in which sexual assault occurs, and the guilt and secrecy that surround it.

## **Lesson 02: Stereotypes & Assumptions**

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### **Slide 2-1. What is Sexual Assault?**

Sexual assault includes any type of sexual activity that is committed by one person without the consent of the other, whether by force, coercion or intimidation. It includes a range of activities often defined by statute.

The term “sexual assault” is used in place of “rape” in this course in order to be more inclusive of the many different types of sexual violation. It is also the term used in the criminal statutes in many states. It is important to understand that sexual assault is about power and control. Sexual assault is not about sexual passion.

You may ask, “If there are so many people being sexually assaulted, why don't I know any victims?” You probably do. Many victims are very selective about whom they tell and may not have disclosed this matter to you.

### **Slide 2-2. Misconceptions – Stereotypes, Assumptions, & Myths**

We are socialized to believe that victims of sexual assault are somehow partly responsible for a crime that has been committed against them. As a society we often “explain” the assault in a way that places responsibility for the crime at the feet of the victim.

We do so because of a number of myths that surround sexual assault. Many of these myths are based upon gender roles which have been traditionally re-enforced by society.

### **Slide 2-3. Misconceptions – Stereotypes, Assumptions, & Myths**

Stereotypes, assumptions, and commonly believed myths pervade every level of thinking. It is important for law enforcement officers to acknowledge that assumptions influence our actions. Awareness of our assumptions will prepare the law enforcement officer to avoid them when speaking with victims. Officers must also be prepared to respond to other people who believe the myths and stereotypes.

## **Slide 2-4. Misconceptions – Stereotypes, Assumptions, & Myths**

Some of the beliefs that have led to misconception about sexual assault include a commonly accepted idea that there is a difference in sexual assault cases. We often want to differentiate assaults to "real sexual assaults" versus "false sexual assault reports."

In other words, "real sexual assault" is the stereotype that our culture has for what constitutes a legitimate sexual assault. "Real sexual assault," in the minds of many people, is perpetrated by a stranger who jumps from the bushes with a knife in his hand and attacks a woman who is seen by everyone as being completely innocent.

## **Slide 2-5. Misconceptions – Stereotypes, Assumptions, & Myths**

Based on cultural myths and misconceptions, many believe that "real sexual assault" is:

- perpetrated by a stranger,
- involves a great deal of physical violence,
- leaves obvious signs of physical injury,
- involves the use of a weapon,
- causes the victim to be hysterical,
- committed at night in a dark alley,
- involves only penile-vaginal penetration, and
- is reported immediately to the police.

Despite the popularity of these beliefs about "real sexual assault," most sexual assault investigators would report that a large proportion of recent cases did not resemble the stereotype. In fact, there are many more sexual assaults committed by acquaintances than by the stereotypical stranger.

## Lesson 03: Changing Dynamics

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### Slide 3-1. Perpetrators

During the last twenty to thirty years, we have seen that sexual assault perpetrators are more likely to be known to and even trusted by the victim. There is a growing incident of acquaintance sexual assault, drug-facilitated sexual assault, and gang sexual assault by young men perceived as the "best and brightest" by their families and communities.

We are no longer safe by believing that perpetrators of sexual assault are strangers in dark clothing that prey on vulnerable women who are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Instead, the perpetrator is likely to be known to the victim, may be male or female, and may be a trusted friend or confidant. Increasingly, these crimes are non-stranger sexual assaults.

It is crucial that officers examine these myths and avoid being influenced by them when responding to victims of sexual assault. Officers must be prepared to respond to persons who hold these misconceptions about sexual assault. That person may be the victim, a significant other, or a helping professional. Officers have an opportunity to clarify the reality of sexual assaults with accurate supportive information.

### Slide 3-2. Attitudes Matter

Law enforcement officer attitudes can have a profound impact on the willingness of victims and others to report sexual assaults, give evidence, or to assist with a case. Public perception of law enforcement officers' attitudes also impact whether or not a victim reports a sexual assault.

Some victims are fearful that officers will not take the report seriously or that the officers will ask insensitive questions. There is also a fear that officers will not empathize with the victim, but may blame the victim. These fears damage the trust necessary between the victims and law enforcement officers.

Recent studies of officer attitudes toward sexual assault suggest that most officers, like other community members, are more sensitive to issues of sexual assault. However, officers differ in their beliefs about whether women sometimes cause or provoke sexual assault by their appearance or behavior.

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# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

## Slide 3-3. Training Changes Attitudes

Studies of officers have shown that those officers who have more experience with sexual assault cases are more empathetic toward victims. In addition, officers who have participated in training about sexual assault also develop more empathetic attitudes and a better understanding of the impact of sexual assault upon victims.

In the next lesson we will look at some of the myths and misconceptions regarding sexual assault.



## Lesson 04: Myths & Misconceptions

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### Slide 4-1. Origins

Myths and misconceptions about sexual assault are linked to sociocultural views about interpersonal violence, perceptions of male and female sex roles, racist myths, and other common stereotypes.

They tend to minimize the seriousness of sexual assault and put the blame on the victim rather than the offender. Exposing these myths and replacing them with facts is the first step toward changing people's attitudes and reducing sexual violence.

### Slide 4-2. The Myths

Let's consider some common myths and misconceptions about sexual assault.

#### **Myth: Sexual assault does not happen very often.**

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**Fact:** The U.S. has the highest rate of sexual assault per capita of any industrialized country. According to the National Crime Victim Research and Treatment Center, in 2011 over two million women in the U.S. were sexually assaulted. Nearly 200,000 experienced drug-facilitated sexual assault, and about 300,000 experienced incapacitated rape.

#### **Myth: People are sexually assaulted because of a rapist's sudden sexual urges.**

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**Fact:** Sexual assault is not a spontaneous act. Sixty to seventy-five percent of single assailant and 90 percent of gang sexual assaults are planned in advance. In addition, sexual assault is not the result of sexual urges. Sexual assault is a result of the desire to exert power and control over another person. It is a life-threatening act, motivated by aggression and sometimes hatred.

#### **Myth: Men who get sexually excited cannot control themselves.**

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**Fact:** Sexual excitement is not an uncontrollable force. For example, when people are having sex and they are aware that someone has entered the room, they are able to stop. Men are not more driven to complete a sexual act than are women.

# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

**Myth: A woman who really resists her attacker cannot be sexual assaulted. If she did not fight back, she must have wanted to have sex.**

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**Fact:** Most women are victims of acquaintance sexual assault. They might not fight back because they know the person assaulting them and are in a state of shock and disbelief. In both stranger and acquaintance sexual assault, the victim might be too frightened or may realize the greater strength of the assailant and choose not to fight back.

**Myth: Rapists and people who sexually abuse children are "crazy" or "sick."**

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**Fact:** Most offenders are not mentally ill; 86% are of normal to superior intelligence and only 7% demonstrate a developmental impairment.

**Myth: People who commit sexual assault usually do so only once.**

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**Fact:** Most rapists commit many acts of sexual assault and continue until they are caught and stopped.

**Myth: Society has a truly progressive attitude about sexual assault.**

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**Fact:** Prevention is still seen as the victim's responsibility. Society looks at the characteristics of the victim, instead of the attacker, to determine whether or not the assault is "real." Reports of sexual assault are increasing four times faster than any other crime.

## Lesson 05: Acquaintance Sexual Assault

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### Slide 5-1. What is it?

Acquaintance sexual assault is unwanted intercourse with a person one already knows. It is a violation of the victim's body and trust. It is an act of violence committed by someone the victim just met, has dated a few times, has known a long time, or perhaps is even engaged to.

The force involved can come from threats or tone of voice, as well as from physical force or weapons. Victims of acquaintance sexual assaults may be either male or female. Lovers, neighbors, friends, coworkers, dates, and classmates can all be perpetrators or victims of acquaintance sexual assault.

The vast majority of sexual assaults are committed against acquaintances. Offenders prefer to know their victims because they have greater opportunity to place victims in a vulnerable position without alarming them. Common preventative methods such as security escorts, blue light phones, and van services are useless if the perpetrator lives in the victim's house or dorm, is the victim's date, drives the victim home from work, or is someone else the victim has reason to trust.

Victims are also far more susceptible to coercion by someone they know because they find it difficult to believe that someone they know and trust would exploit them. They recognize the danger too late.

Acquaintance sexual assault often has even more devastating effects on its victims than sexual assault by strangers because it destroys the victim's fundamental faith and trust in human relationships.

### Slide 5-2. Consent

One of the dynamics of sexual assault is the issue of consent. A victim may say "no" and mean it, while a sexual aggressor may think that "no" doesn't really mean "no." The aggressor may believe that if the victim agrees to go out on a date, wears seductive clothing, goes somewhere alone with the aggressor, or is known to have had sex with someone else, consent to sex is implied. None of these gives consent. Consent may be given verbally for each sexual act in which people participate. Each participant must be able to say "no" at any point.





# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

Frequently, both the victim and the offender have been drinking or have taken drugs. Sometimes, offenders use drugs or alcohol with the intent of assaulting victims when they are semi-conscious or unable to resist. A sinister development in sexual assault is the rise of "date-sexual assault drugs".

## **Slide 5-3. Perpetrators**

Perpetrators of acquaintance sexual assault usually know that their victims have not given consent, and choose to ignore it. Date rapists usually plan to have sex, not necessarily to sexual assault. But they may have already decided that if their "dates" refuse, they will simply take what they feel is their due: sex.

The behavior of the date rapist is an act of force that is motivated by a desire for power and control.

Many acquaintance assailants have forced sex before and have gotten away with it. They usually look for victims who are unassertive. They do not see themselves as rapists. The number of men and women who commit date sexual assault may be relatively small, but the number of victims whose lives are shattered by each offender is often large.

## **Slide 5-4. Victims**

Victims of most, but not all acquaintance sexual assaults are young women under the age of 25. Many victims, both male and female, are under the age of 16. These victims are particularly ill-prepared to deal with an offender who is goal-oriented and has planned the assault in advance. Many perpetrators are males who are at least a year or more older than their victims.

Many of these types of sexual assaults occur at colleges and universities, where it is easy to entice a victim who may be both naïve and easily talked into being alone with the offender. Sexual assault often happens to high school students as well.

## **Slide 5-5. Impact of Sexual Assault by an Acquaintance**

Sexual assault by an acquaintance is not a simple crime of passion or merely a result of miscommunication. It is a crime of power, anger, or both. Forcing sex on another person makes the perpetrator feel strong because it makes someone else feel weak. Sexual assault is violence against a person who is less powerful, and it is a crime.

# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

Victims of acquaintance sexual assault need to be reassured that it is a crime, that "no" means "no," and that they did not cause the sexual assault. The perpetrator committed an assault.

Often, especially in a college situation, the sexual assault survivor and the attacker live near each other or may see each other every day. This can be particularly stressful to the survivor because the perpetrator may see the sexual assault as a conquest or as an 'innocent mistake.'

Victims of acquaintance sexual assault may be further stressed by lack of support from friends or family members. Friends may be especially unlikely to view the incident as sexual assault if they are friends of both the survivor and the offender, or if the rapist is someone who appears superficially "nice."

Attitudes that the sexual assault was deserved or a "misunderstanding" belittles the survivor's traumatic experience. Attitudes that blame the survivor help to perpetuate such violence as date and acquaintance sexual assault.

## Slide 5-6. Myths about Acquaintance Sexual assault

Let's consider some of the myths and misconceptions that surround acquaintance sexual assault.

**Myth: The typical assault takes place in an alley, after dark, by a stranger. To keep themselves safe, women should stay at home at night and avoid high risk places such as bars and parties.**

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**Fact:** Eighty-four percent of sexual assault victims are attacked by people they know. Thirty-three percent of the time, the attacker is someone they know well. Most sexual assaults happen in places where women are taught to believe they are safest. More than half of sexual assaults happen in the victim's home.

**Myth: Women are sexually assaulted because they dress provocatively and are, therefore, tempting to the rapist. The women were asking for it.**

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**Fact:** Sometimes people make assumptions about another person because of how that person is dressed, and they act on those assumptions. Victims of sexual assault are not responsible for the assumptions or actions of others. No one asks to be sexually assaulted. In addition, studies show that rapists choose their victims based on perceived vulnerability and not on sexual attractiveness.

# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

**Myth: It is acceptable to force sex on a woman who is saying "no" because she actually means "yes" and is just afraid to say it. Besides, if a woman agrees to a certain level of sexual interaction, she has agreed to have intercourse.**

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**Fact:** People are capable of deciding what should happen to their own bodies. No one else has the right to assume that "no" means anything other than no. People have the right to engage in some sexual activity without necessarily engaging in all kinds of sexual activity. A person can say "no" or change their mind at any point, and about any activity.

**Myth: Acquaintance sexual assault does not carry as serious an impact on the victim as stranger sexual assault.**

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**Fact:** Sexual assault has a serious impact on all victims as it is a violent act over which they have no control. In some instances, victims of acquaintance sexual assault experience additional trauma caused by their sense of being betrayed by that person.

**Myth: Women are always "crying sexual assault," claiming that they were sexually assaulted when they were not.**

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**Fact:** Only 16% of sexual assaults are reported to the police. In cases where the assailant was an acquaintance, the rate is only 10%. Some reasons for not reporting include shame and fear resulting from the attack, fear of going through the court system, and/or fear of being confronted by the media. Myths of false reporting affect credibility, consent determinations by law enforcement officers, and cause an over-estimation of false reporting.

## **Lesson 06: Spouse or Partner Sexual Assault**

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### **Slide 6-1. What is it?**

Many people do not believe that sexual assault can happen within a marriage or a seriously committed relationship where two people are living together. This may be one of the most misunderstood types of sexual assault

Marital or partner sexual assault may be accomplished without consent or against a person's will by physical force, threats of force to the victim or a third person, or implied harm based on prior assault causing the victim to fear that physical force will be used if he or she resists.

Spouse or partner sexual assaults include marital sexual assault. It is an act of violence, and it is now a crime in all 50 states and federal territories. Spouse or partner sexual assault is any sexual act in which a spouse, former spouse, domestic partner, or former domestic partner forces the other person to participate without that person's consent.

Spouse or partner sexual assault is not based in the desire for sex by the perpetrator or the withholding of sex by the victim. Rather, it is used to reinforce the rapist's power, dominance or control, or to express anger.

### **Slide 6-2. Incidence**

According to multiple surveys, approximately 10 percent of all women who have been married have been sexually assaulted by a husband or ex-husband. Victims of wife or partner sexual assault are more likely than other victims to be sexually assaulted multiple times.

Some victims of marital or partner sexual assault may have a history of being physically abused or have been subjected to emotional or psychological abuse from this same spouse or partner. A spouse or partner who has experienced such abuse in the past may agree to sexual advances in order to minimize the harm by resisting as little as possible.



# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

It is common among battered spouses for the abusive partner to demand sex immediately following a beating, as proof that the battered partner "forgives" the beating. When a spouse or partner submits to sexual acts out of fear or coercion, it is sexual assault. Victims of this type of abuse may be either women or men.

## Slide 6-3. Results

Like other victims of acquaintance sexual assault, they suffer long-lasting psychological effects. Marital or partner assault is especially painful because it is a violation of their bodies and their trust by a loved and trusted person.

Law enforcement officers who serve culturally diverse populations may encounter women from some cultural backgrounds, such as some Hispanic, Middle Eastern, and Asian cultures, who believe that their husband is entitled to do anything he wishes to his wife. Officers in such situations may need to explain that the law in the U.S. considers sexual assault by a spouse a crime. These women may particularly benefit from referral to an advocate from either the sexual assault coalition or domestic violence groups.

## Slide 6-4. Myths about Spouse or Partner Sexual Assault

Let's consider some myths and misconceptions about Spouse or Partner Sexual Assault.

### **Myth: A husband cannot sexually assault his wife.**

**Fact:** An estimated 1 in 10 women is sexual assaulted by her husband. Marital sexual assault is recognized as a crime. A woman has the right to say "no" to unwanted sex regardless of marital status.

Marriage does not imply, and is not equal to, consent to any sexual act at any time.

### **Myth: If two people are living together and have an intimate relationship, a sexual assault cannot occur.**

**Fact:** Just because an intimate relationship exists between two people it does not imply and is not equal to consent to any sexual act at any time.



## **Lesson 07: Male Sexual Assault**

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### **Slide 7-1. Can Happen to Any Man**

Sexual assault can happen to anyone including men. Thousands of men are sexually assaulted every year, regardless of their race, class, age, religion, sexual orientation, size, appearance, or strength. A male can be sexually assaulted by a stranger, a family member, or someone he knows and trusts. Male sexual assault is any sexual act in which a male is forced to participate without that person's consent.

Male sexual assault remains vastly underreported; however, the U.S. Department of Justice documents more than 13,000 cases of male sexual assault every year.

### **Slide 7-2. Silent Crime**

Although a "silent crime" because it is seldom reported, male sexual assault accounts for at least 10 percent of all sexual assaults in the U.S. Rates would probably be even higher if more male victims reported their experiences. Our society often fails to acknowledge male sexual assault.

Although good statistics are not kept, based on the evidence that does exist, more than half of male sexual assault victims are assaulted by an acquaintance. About 25 percent are assaulted by a spouse or partner, and only about 20 percent are assaulted by a stranger.

### **Slide 7-3. How it Happens**

Tactics used by perpetrators of male sexual assault include intimidation by threats or weapons, brute strength, sudden attack, entrapments using drugs or alcohol, and use of authority or power.

As discussed earlier, men can be sexually assaulted by women, although these crimes are seldom reported. A woman who is boss, doctor, therapist, or teacher, or who in any other way has power over a man, can coerce him into sex against his will, and feel confident that the man will not report it, or if he does, will face ridicule, disbelief, blame, and emasculation.

## **Slide 7-4. Gender Does Not Matter**

Male perpetrators of sexual assault on males are not necessarily homosexual, nor are their victims.

One-half of the offenders and one-half of the victims in male-on-male sexual assault consider themselves strictly heterosexual. For half of all sexual offenders, the gender of the victim is inconsequential. Their victims include both males and females, and both adults and children.

The victim is usually chosen by accessibility; that is, being in the wrong place at the wrong time, in the wrong circumstances, rather than by gender, sexual orientation, or age.

## **Slide 7-5. Impact**

Victims of male sexual assault, like victims of acquaintance sexual assault, frequently blame themselves or do not immediately identify what happened as sexual assault. Knowing that male victims will not want to report their sexual assault, criminals sometimes commit the additional crime of sexual assault against male victims of other crimes. Male victims may have difficulty speaking about the assault.

Male sexual assault victims who become sexually aroused, have an erection, or ejaculate may be especially embarrassed and confused, fearing that it really does mean they "enjoyed it." In fact, sexual arousal and ejaculation are involuntary physiological reactions that do not mean consent or enjoyment of the traumatic experience. However, some assailants may intentionally get their victims to ejaculate to confuse them and discourage them from reporting the assault.

## Slide 7-6. Myths about Male Sexual Assault

Let's explore some of the myths about male sexual assault.

**Myth: Men are not victims of sexual assault. They have the physical strength to overpower any potential attacker and are rarely sexually assaulted.**

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**Fact:** According to the FBI, an estimated 1 in 7 men is sexually assaulted. It is not impossible for a man or a woman to physically overpower a male victim. Also, physical force is not the only method used to commit a sexual assault. A perpetrator may use threats or coercion. In addition, the victim may be too shocked or frightened to resist or fight back.

**Myth: Real men can't be sexually assaulted. A real man could fight off the perpetrator and protect himself.**

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**Fact:** Men can be and are sexually assaulted. There is stigma associated with male sexual assault based on the myth that real men cannot be sexually assaulted. Even more than other sexual assault victims, male survivors are likely to be disbelieved, discounted, blamed, and humiliated.

**Myth: If a heterosexual male is sexually assaulted he is probably "actually" gay.**

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**Fact:** Any male can be sexually assaulted. All male victims fear that they will be seen as emasculated or not real men. It is important to remember that male sexual assault, like any other form of sexual assault, is not a crime of sexual gratification but a violent crime of power, control, humiliation, and/or anger.

## **Lesson 08: Sexual Assault of Lesbians & Gays**

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### **Slide 8-1. What is it?**

Lesbians and gay men are subject to the same spectrum of sexual violence as the rest of the population. Like a lot of victims of sexual assault, lesbian and gay victims are forced or coerced to participate in unwanted sexual activity. The victims do not cause their assaults and are not to blame. Sexual assault against lesbians and gays are acts of violence, not sex. Assaults are motivated primarily out of anger and/or a need to feel powerful by controlling, dominating, or humiliating the victim.

Transvestites (people who wear the dress of the opposite gender) and transgendered individuals (people who have changed their gender by surgery or hormones) are not necessarily homosexual. However, they are often perceived as homosexual, and the issues and motivations surrounding sexual assault are essentially the same as for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals.

### **Slide 8-2. Hate Crimes**

Approximately 10% of hate crimes against gay men and lesbians include sexual assault. The number of sexual assaults that are hate crimes is not well documented. It is sometimes difficult for lesbians or gays to discern whether they were attacked because of their sexual orientation. Also victims of sexual assault may not wish to report that the assault was a hate crime because they may fear discrimination.

Although it is known that gays and lesbians are victims of hate crimes six times more often than other victims, it is not known whether this is high for hate-motivated sexual assaults.

Whether gay men or lesbians face the same danger from date and partner sexual assault as heterosexuals is unknown, because few such crimes are reported.

### **Slide 8-3. Victims**

Gays and lesbians are extremely vulnerable as victims of sexual assault because they often cannot expect support or protection from the community around them. They may already be isolated and shrouded in secrecy because of others' intolerance.



# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

Gays and lesbians who are victims of sexual assault may therefore experience compounded symptoms and difficulties compared to other victims, and may have a much harder time recovering from the trauma. In some especially gruesome cases, both members of a same-sex couple may be sexually assaulted, multiplying further difficulties in recovering.

Assault by an acquaintance or partner may be especially damaging because gay men and lesbians may already feel unsafe in the heterosexual world; thus, the assault destroys their sense that there is anyone they can trust not to hurt them.

## **Slide 8-4. Impact on Gays**

For gay men, the experience of sexual assault is especially traumatic because they particularly fear being killed, having read or heard news accounts of gay victims of hate-motivated sexual assault and murder. They also experience all of the difficulties discussed in relation to male sexual assault. They may experience recurring dreams or nightmares of being chased or attacked, choked or stabbed.

## **Slide 8-5. Impact on Lesbians**

Sexual assault also exposes lesbians to special terrors, especially if sexually assaulted by men. Not only do they have to fear being beaten and murdered, but the act of vaginal or anal penetration may be particularly traumatic, medically as well as emotionally. Lesbians may have an especially difficult time facing the possibility of pregnancy or of infection with HIV or sexually transmitted diseases.

## **Slide 8-6. Myths & Misconceptions**

Most people do not think about the fact that both lesbians and gays are also victims of sexual assault. There are also myths and misconceptions that impact our understanding about these victims of sexual assault. It is important to understand that same-gender sexual assault does not mean the victim or the perpetrator is homosexual.

Another myth about sexual assault on lesbians and gays is that they are sexual deviates, rapists, and child molesters. This myth scapegoats lesbians and gays. In fact, the overwhelming majority of perpetrators of sexual violence, even against people of the same sex, are heterosexual.



## **Lesson 09: Sexual Assault of the Elderly & Disabled**

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### **Slide 9-1. Hidden Crime**

While other forms of sexual assault have received increasing attention from professionals and the media during recent years, sexual abuse of elderly or disabled persons remains relatively hidden. This is true partly because sexuality is usually associated with younger or more able people.

Sexual assault of the elderly or disabled is any sexual act committed with an elder, or with a person who is mentally or physically disabled, and without their consent. In some cases, a severely mentally disabled person may not be capable of giving informed consent.

### **Slide 9-2. Dynamics**

Given that sexual assault is a function of power and control, frail older or disabled persons, who often have little power and may be dependent on others for care, can be extremely vulnerable to sexual assault. It is most often not the physical attributes of victims but rather their vulnerability that attracts sexual offenders.

Elders and disabled persons may be coerced through force, trickery, threats, or other means into sexual contact against their will. It may begin with covert activities such as inappropriate remarks and threats, and escalate to the full range of sexual assault behaviors. These individuals may be exploited through prostitution, sadistic acts, and ritualistic abuse.

### **Slide 9-3. Perpetrators**

Elder and disabled victims often have significant impairments leaving them almost totally dependent on others for daily assistance. The majority of sexual assault perpetrators are acquaintances, family members, caregivers, or housekeepers. Most perpetrators are young, single, white males. An elderly victim may symbolize an authority figure that the offender wants to control or retaliate against.

Victims are sometimes considered inferior or disposable people by the perpetrator, which can lead the perpetrators to think that sexual assault of these victims is permissible.

# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

## Slide 9-4. Victims

Most elderly victims are female, but there are a significant number of male victims as well. The risk of assault-related injury is greater among elderly victims. Elderly victims may also have difficulty speaking about their assault. Individuals with speech and language problems or cognitive impairments may be unable to ask for help or to disclose the abuse to others. Individuals with developmental disabilities or mental illness are at high risk. Officers should speak slowly and calmly using clear and easy to understand language. Do not assume they are not credible. People with physical challenges, such as speech or hearing, may not have a developmental disability. People with disabilities are often treated as they were children and may not be taken seriously.

Moreover, generational issues of shame and taboo may make it difficult for elders to discuss sexual acts.

## Slide 9-5. Impact

People with severe lifelong disabilities and elderly persons who have major impairments may not feel that they "own their bodies," which are constantly being manipulated by others. They may have a harder time distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

They are usually taught using both positive and negative reinforcement to comply with authority figures, and are therefore eager to please. Their choices are often not respected, so that their "no" doesn't always mean "no" to any of the people around them. They may be isolated and lack a support network. They may often need the assistance of many caregivers, which increases the possibility that one will be an offender.

In the majority of cases, the assault occurs in the person's home leaving them permanently terrified- yet often unable to cope with the difficulties of executing a move to a new home. Elderly and disabled persons are often already subject to low self-esteem and depression, and are at high risk of losing their will to live following sexual assault.

## Slide 9-6. Myths & Misconceptions

There are also myths and misconceptions about sexual assault of elders and those who are disabled. These people are also victims of sexual assault.

# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

**Myth: People with disabilities and elders are not capable of giving accurate information about their sexual assault due to cognitive impairments.**

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**Fact:** While in the past people with cognitive impairments had little or no credibility if they did report abuse, there is growing awareness that these people are often victimized in a number of ways.

**Myth: Elderly people and those with disabilities are rarely sexually assaulted because they are often in residential placements with professional care givers.**

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**Fact:** The incidence of sexual assault by predators who select employment as caregivers has grown. Many states have implemented pre-employment criminal background checks in order to decrease predator access to vulnerable disabled victims.

## Lesson 10: Review & Conclusion

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### Review Introduction

This first course in the Sexual Assault series should have increased your awareness of important sexual assault issues, including:

- Stereotypes, assumptions, myths, and misconceptions,
- Changing dynamics,
- Acquaintance, spouse, or partner sexual assault,
- Sexual assault of men, lesbians, and gays, and
- Sexual assault of the elderly and disabled.

Remember, law enforcement officer attitudes can also have a profound impact on the willingness of victims and others to report sexual assaults, give evidence, or to assist with a case.

Now, take a moment to check your understanding of the material presented in this course by answering a few review questions.

### Review & Reinforcement Quiz

#### Question 01.

Sexual assault is a crime of passion. (Review Slide 2-1)

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

#### Question 02.

True or false? More sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim than by strangers. (Review Slide 2-2)

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

#### Question 03.

True or false? Stereotypes, assumptions, and commonly believed myths about sexual assaults can pervade everyone's thinking, including law enforcement officers. (Review Slide 2-2)

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

## Question 04.

Law enforcement officers' attitudes can have a profound impact on the willingness of victims and others to \_\_\_\_\_. Select all that apply. (Review Slide 3-2)

- ☐ report sexual assaults
- ☐ give evidence
- ☐ assist with sexual assault cases

## Question 05.

Victims' fear can often impact their trust and willingness to report sexual assaults due to their belief that law enforcement officers will \_\_\_\_\_. Select all that apply. (Review Slide 3-2)

- ☐ ask insensitive questions
- ☐ not take their report seriously
- ☐ blame the victims for the assaults

## Question 06.

Acquaintance sexual assault often has \_\_\_\_\_ devastating effects on its victims than sexual assault by strangers. (Review Slide 5-1)

- ☐ Virtually no
- ☐ Less
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ Even more

## Question 07.

True or false? Male perpetrators of sexual assault on males are not necessarily homosexual, nor are their victims. (Review Slide 7-4)

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

## Question 08.

True or false? Gays and lesbians who are victims of sexual assault may experience compounded symptoms and difficulties compared to other victims. (Review Slide 8-3)

- ☐ True
- ☐ False



# UNDERSTANDING *Sexual* ASSAULT

## Question 09.

True or False? Sexual assault exposes lesbians to special terrors, especially if sexually assaulted by men. (Slide 8-5, A)

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

## Question 10.

The majority of sexual assault perpetrators of elderly and disabled victims are \_\_\_\_\_. (Select all that apply). (Slide 9-3)

- ☐ acquaintances
- ☐ family members
- ☐ caregivers
- ☐ housekeepers

## Conclusion

Congratulations!

You have completed *Understanding Sexual Assault*.

During this course, you have learned that sexual assault is about power and control, and that socialized beliefs have led to stereotypes, myths, and assumptions that pervade every level of thinking about sexual assault. Awareness of these assumptions, myths and misconceptions will prepare law enforcement officers to speak with victims.

Officers should also be prepared to respond to persons who hold these misconceptions about sexual assault. They may be the victim, a significant other, or a helping professional. Officers have an opportunity to clarify the reality of sexual assaults with accurate, supportive information.

The next course in this series will provide training on:

- Responding to Sexual Assault

For additional information regarding sexual assault, consult the agencies and organizations listed in the *Resources* section of the course.